

Saipan Tribune

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INSIDE



Community Walk

The Commonwealth Diabetes Coalition is inviting the community to take advantage of daily Community Walks aimed at helping families, individuals and groups make exercise a daily habit.

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Topnotch Biz

Topnotch, the leading local business engaged in making plaques and trophies, has relocated to a bigger home at the heart of Saipan's commercial district in Garapan.

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Mel's Passion

It's a clash of power, religion and history more fit for the apocalyptic Book of Revelation than the pages of Variety. But this is a fight over a movie.

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Faster work permit processing mulled

Labor Department targets 10-day work permit processing by May 1

By MARIAN A. MARAYA
REPORTER

Come May 1, expect work permit processing to take no more than 10 days.

Deputy Labor Secretary Andrew S. Salas confirmed this development yesterday, as he touted the department's goal to remove all redundancies in the application process.

"What used to take months to even a year will take 10 days come May 1," Salas assured.

The former congressman said that upon his appointment as Labor Secretary Dr. Jack Tenorio's deputy, he immediately embarked on a mission to streamline the drawn-out application process.



Salas

From some 26 documents, Salas said Labor would be asking for three main requirements: bonding, employee contract, and Job Vacancy Announcements.

He noted that these three requirements collectively sum up to 7 to 10 pages.

"And because we've narrowed it down from 26 to 3, we are going to process applications and tell you if you're deficient right there and then at the window. It will never take us longer than 10 days. If you're deficient, you have seven

See **FASTER** on Page 8

US Congress sets hearing on CNMI's health issues

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The U.S. House of Representatives has invited local officials headed by Gov. Juan N. Babauta and Health Secretary James U. Hofschneider for a congressional hearing on CNMI health issues on Feb. 25.

Indiana Rep. Dan Burton, chairman of the U.S.



Burton

the people of your territory."

The hearing in general aims to investigate health care disparities in U.S. Pacific island territories.

The CNMI is asked to provide 100



Hofschneider



Babauta

House committee on Governor Reform subcommittee on wellness and human rights, said the panel aims to look into "health care disparities experienced by

copies of its testimony to the committee no later than 72 hours prior to the hearing.

See **US CONGRESS** on Page 8

New finance secretary touts revenue-enhancement efforts

By MARIAN A. MARAYA
REPORTER

Acting Finance Secretary Fermin M. Atalig vowed to spruce up, among others, the government's revenue enhancement arm as new finance chief.

The governor's nominee, who is jumping from one Cabinet position—as

Commerce Secretary—to another, anticipates the new task to be a big challenge, conscious that now is a critical time to be Finance Secretary.

"The only thing that I can promise is that I'll do my best," said Atalig in an interview yesterday. His nomination has to be confirmed by the Senate.

See **NEW** on Page 8

USDA: Kagman project to benefit all

Although some traffic inconveniences will continue in the near future, the completion of the Kagman Watershed Project will benefit Kagman residents and farmers, as well as the rest of the island, assured Scott Crockett, District Conservationist for the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service in Saipan.

To date, nearly \$4.4 million in federal funds have been spent on project

design and construction activities, compared to just over \$817,000 in local funds. The project, once fully completed, will have estimated annual benefits of \$180,000 of flood prevention and \$500,000 of irrigation water supply.

Other benefits will include an enhanced farm economy, wildlife habitat protection, reduced pressure on the aquifer, a healthier coral reef and a cleaner

See **USDA** on Page 8

Local

Judge nixes reduced sentence plea

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

The Superior Court has denied the request of a convicted rapist to reduce his 15-year prison term, saying he would be eligible anyway for parole after a little over four years.

Associate Judge David Wiseman, who had imposed the maximum penalty for sexual assault in the first degree against Gabriel Grogthog, turned down the reduction request, noting that the defendant would be eligible for parole after serving four years and three months in jail.

In meting out the prison term

against Grogthog, Wiseman had called the acts of the defendant barbaric and outrageous.

Grogthog had kidnapped a woman, beat her up and sodomized her about two years ago. He was convicted based on a plea agreement with the Attorney General’s Office. Of his 15-year prison term, the judge only suspended two years.

“In view of the parole factor, the court believes the sentence in this matter should remain as it is,” the judge said.

Court records showed that Grogthog, together with Oscar Meeyog, had abducted a woman on Aug. 24, 2002. Inside a ve-

hicle, Grogthog kicked and punched the victim, making her lose consciousness.

The two brought the victim to a pavilion when she regained consciousness. At the pavilion, the two held her down at knifepoint and tore her clothes. As Meeyog held the woman’s arms, Grogthog began raping and sodomizing her repeatedly at knifepoint.

Grogthog threatened to kill the victim if she tells anyone about the incident. But the victim managed to escape and ran to the streets naked to find safety.

Originally, the AGO charged Grogthog and Meeyog with a total of 43 criminal charges. These

include kidnapping, false arrest, conspiracy, sexual assault in the first and second degrees, assault with a dangerous weapon, aggravated assault, assault and battery and disturbing the peace.

The AGO agreed to have the remaining charges dismissed against Grogthog when he pleaded guilty to sexual assault in the first degree.

Meeyog pleaded guilty to the same offense and an additional conspiracy charge. The court sentenced him to eight years imprisonment, two years of which were suspended. The court ruled that the six-year jail term was without parole.

Three establishments cited for violating sanitation standards

The Bureau of Environmental Health has closed down two eating and drinking establishments and one illegal vendor due to serious violations of health and sanitation standards.

The Guang Zhou Restaurant in Garapan was closed down on Jan. 27 but has since re-opened on Jan. 29, 2004. The Oceanside Bar & Grill was also closed down on Feb. 6. Anita B. Rosete/R.C. Mafnas Taxi #957 was closed down for being an illegal vendor.

The bureau said there may have been changes to these grades since the date this information was released.

The sanitary inspections were conducted during the week of Jan. 25, 2004 to Feb. 7, 2004.

Other establishments inspected and their respective grades were:

Grade “A”

1. ABCD Market, Kobleville
2. Golden Harvest Restaurant, Susupe

3. Greenpia Market, Chalan Kanoa
4. Moon Night Club, Chalan Kanoa
5. Tai Hu Shark’s Fin Seafood Restaurant, Chalan Kanoa
6. Boss Music Karaoke Box, Chalan Kanoa
7. Ping Sports Bar, Chalan Kanoa
8. Chapino’s Restaurant, Chalan Kanoa
9. Subway Chalan Piao, Chalan Piao

10. Palm Pool Bar (Hotel Riviera), Fina Sisu
11. New Mart, Chalan Laulau
12. Pure Water Supplies, Chalan Laulau
13. Pizza Hut Restaurant, Gualo Rai
14. Bostonian Bakery, Gualo Rai
15. Chingie’s Catering, Gualo Rai
16. Sea Tonino’s, Garapan
17. Kimichi Cabana Night Club, Garapan
18. Micronesian Night Club, Garapan
19. VFW Club Bar & Restaurant, Garapan
20. 99 Cents (Butcher Shop), Garapan
21. Kaizoku Restaurant, Garapan
22. Star Dust Club, Garapan
23. Moby Dick Restaurant, Garapan
24. Brother’s Market, Kagman

- Grade “B”**
1. Jin Store, Dandan
 2. Miramar BBQ Stand, San Vicente
 3. Riviera Resort Restaurant (Hotel Riviera), Fina Sisu
 4. Golden Lobster Restaurant, Susupe
 5. Wallace Theatre Snack Bar, San Jose
 6. Sushi Land Restaurant, Gualo Rai
 7. 99 Cents Super Market, Garapan
 8. Beach Garden Restaurant, Garapan
 9. New Arirang Restaurant, Garapan
 10. Latte Café Restaurant, Garapan
 11. Seoul One Restaurant, Garapan
 12. Chung Gi Wa Restaurant, Garapan
 13. Kim’s Market, Navy Hill

- Grade “C”**
- None
- For updated information, call the Bureau of Environmental Health at 664-4870 or fax 664-4871.

nikko

diabetes
+red

House gears up for its first session

By **MARIAN A. MARAYA**
REPORTER

A slew of bills, local bills and resolutions have been prefiled at the House Clerk’s office, totaling 16 as of Thursday morning in anticipation of the first regular House session that is just three days away.

The legislative measures—which largely deals with appropriation for pending projects—were mostly submitted by returning members, most of them congressmen belonging to the Republican minority that had dominated the 13th House of Representatives.

House Clerk Evelyn Fleming confirmed to reporters yesterday that more bills are expected to be filed, especially on the session day itself, which is Feb. 9.

Other members are reportedly still finalizing bills they are poised to introduce. One member is reportedly planning to float as many as 20 measures on Monday.

Asked what can be expected on the 14th House’s very first session, Vice Speaker Timothy

Villagomez yesterday said: “A variety of things.”

“The leadership has been meeting. But what’s more important is that the leader-ship...has been meeting with some of the agencies and getting input from them. Like I said, we want to hear from them on what the Legislature can do to assist the departments.

“That’s what’s been keeping us busy and a lot of the bills that we’ll be introducing is a result of the efforts from both agencies and Legislature. So it’s not just one-sided,” said Villagomez.

The Covenant-ruled House will convene for a regular session for the first time on Monday, alongside one Democrat member, seven Republicans and one independent member.

Despite the different party affiliations, the vice speaker expressed optimism that cooperation will rule in this Legislature.

“I think everyone of us has a common goal and that’s to help. And that’s always been my philosophy and I’m sure that once we go to the chamber, everyone

is going to look at the common good of why we’re here,” said Villagomez.

The prefiled bills are mostly the same measures that never made it through the previous Legislature.

Among them are House Bill 14-1 by Rep. Joe Guerrero which seeks to appropriate \$5.58 million for 702 CIP Covenant funding for certain CIP in FY03; and HB 14-2 by Rep. David Apatang and other minority members,

which appropriates \$1.5 million for various CIP projects in the three senatorial districts.

Other prefiled House bills include those by Rep. Benjamin Seman: the proposed Nursing Practice Act, Tobacco Settlement Escrow Enforcement Act, Domestic Violence Act, Anti-Stalking Act, sin tax appropriation, Inhalant Abuse Act and the

Commonwealth Respite Service Program.

Rep. Norman Palacios has put forward four bills, including the proposed Tinian Marine Reserve Act; the appropriation of \$575,000 for the Tinian museum; and the proposal to authorize the commercial operation of amusement machines at CNMI’s seaports and airports.

Note: with mug of Tim Villagomez.

dehins kasya

conwood

cbcruz

baby news

mcdo

Water outage set for tomorrow

There will be a water outage tomorrow, Feb. 21, at the Isley-Airport Area, from 8am to 5pm.

In a statement from the Commonwealth Utilities Corp., it said the water outage is necessary as its crew will work on a pump station at Isley Field.

Those affected by the outage are CUC customers who live or work along the Airport Road facilities, continuing to Lower Dandan Homestead, and to the Shell gas station, then south down to the As Lito village main road, stopping in front of a hardware store at the traffic lights and intersection (to the agricultural station).

The water is off from 8am to 5pm or just as soon as crews are finished with the maintenance.

There are 13 wells connected and feeding water into the tank to be cleaned. The tank holds 14,000 gallons of water. Here, the water is blended and treated

with chlorine gas before its release to customers. CUC releases 27,000 gallons every hour, or a total of 648,000 gallons per day.

“One crew will cleans the big tank, where harmful bacteria could have grown; another crew will dismantle and replace valves that are designed to prevent malfunctions.

Harmful bacteria cling to items in the water distribution system, at the wellheads, storage tanks, and pipelines. When the water is not treated well enough, or when the water is exposed to forms of life, the bacteria breeds. Some people, like kids who would have not been exposed, the elderly, and the ill are more sensitive to these bacteria,” CUC said.

Next up for the CUC crew is the Navy Hill area, where they will conduct maintenance work on Feb. 28. CUC said it will provide customers with more details on this.



Chacha Oceanview PTSA meeting set

The ChaCha Oceanview Junior High School is informing parents and legal guardians of its students that they will have a Parent Teacher Student Association meeting on Feb. 26, at the school’s cafeteria, at 6-7pm.

The agenda of this meeting will cover the 8th and 7th grade trip, promotional ceremony and other important school matters.

All parents and legal guardians are encouraged to attend this important meeting. For more information, call 664-4100/4103/4106.

SVES has new vice principal

San Vicente Elementary School recently welcomed it new vice principal to the SVES family.

SVES PTA Secretary Jim Rayphand took over the vice principal post after serving as deputy executive director for the Northern Marianas Protection and Advocacy Systems, or NMPASI.

Rayphand is no stranger to the school as he is a former second grade teacher a few years back. As a parent, Rayphand has also been and continues to be an active member of the school’s Parent-Teacher Association.

School principal Janet Villagomez urged parents and guardians to cooperate and assist Rayphand as he takes on his new duties and responsibilities.

DES raffle draw postponed to May

The Dandan Elementary School has postponed its 6th Annual Cultural Day Raffle Drawing and Festivities from Feb. 14 to May 22.

“We apologize for the inconvenience this has brought upon the parents and others who have made efforts to participate in this school function. On behalf of the administration, teachers, parents, students, and the PTA of-

ficers of their school community, we thank you for your understanding and continued support in every way possible,” said the school in a media statement.

Veterans of Saipan, Tinian battles sought

Veterans of the World War II battles of Saipan and Tinian will be invited to the commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Battle for Saipan and Tinian to be held June 12-16, 2004 on Saipan.

The Committee for the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of WWII is soliciting help from newspapers, churches, state and local chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Veterans Associations, non-profit organizations, and family members to help identify veterans to be recognized.

Anyone who knows a veteran involved in these battles should send their name and contact information to Jessica Jordan at marianas04-anniversary@yahoo.com, or call (670) 234-7212; fax: (670) 234-7211, or mail: PMB 409 Box 10000 Saipan MP 96950.

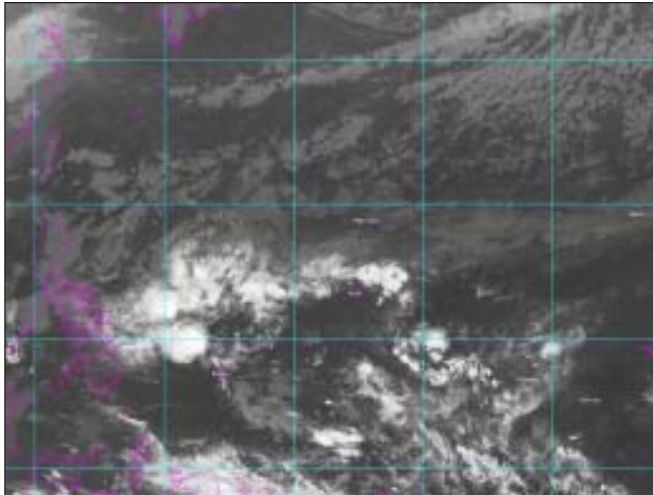
Victim hotline volunteers sought

Do you want to make a difference? Do you want to help out our community? Are you interested in issues such as domestic violence, child physical and sexual abuse, rape, or suicide?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, then you may be the right kind of person to become a Victim Hotline Volunteer. The Victim Hotline is a 24/7 telephone crisis intervention hotline that provides access to information, referral, and a listening ear to victims of crimes in the Northern Marianas.

Interested individuals may contact Velma Del Rosario at 234-5100.

WEATHER FORECAST



PICTURE TIME: 1:00 A.M., FEBRUARY 19, 2004
Western North Pacific between Equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A cold front extends from near 25n175e southwestward to near 16n158e and continues as a shear line to 13n130e. Widespread showers extend up to 200 miles north of this boundary. A monsoon trough extends from near 10n130e through the remnant circulation of tropical depression 01w near 9n133e eastward to near 5n152e and ends near eq158e. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms associated with the trough are located north of Palau and Yap between 9n and 14n from 130e to 142e...and southeast of Palau and Yap between the equator and 7n from 136e to 151e. Trade-wind convergence is producing a few showers across Pohnpei between 4n and 8n from 154e to 159e...and near Majuro between 4n and 6n from 173e to 177e.

SAIPAN AND TINIAN
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 10-15 mph. Highs near 86. Lows near 75.

GUAM AND ROTA
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 10-15 mph. Highs near 86.

PALAU
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Variable at less than 10 kt.

POHNPEI
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 10-15 kt.

YAP AND ULITHI
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Southeast at 10 kt.

KOSRAE
Mostly cloudy with scattered showers.
Winds: Northeast at 10-15 kt.

CHUUK
Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: East at 10-15 kt.

MAJURO
Mostly cloudy with isolated showers.
Winds: Northeast at 10-15 kt.

CITY	FORECAST	HIGH	LOW
Auckland	Partly Cloudy	67F (19C)	57F (14C)
Beijing	Sunny	60F (16C)	49F (9C)
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	68F (20C)	59F (15C)
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	83F (28C)	69F (21C)
London, England	Cloudy	45F (7C)	34F (1C)
Los Angeles	Rain	67F (19C)	50F (10C)
Manila	Partly Cloudy	89F (32C)	73F (23C)
Melbourne	Sunny	85F (29C)	57F (14C)
Miami	Partly Cloudy	68F (20C)	49F (9C)
New York City	Cloudy	38F (3C)	28F (-2C)
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	49F (9C)	29F (-2C)
Paris	Cloudy	37F (3C)	26F (-3C)
Pusan	Sunny	55F (13C)	36F (2C)
Rome	Partly Cloudy	51F (11C)	37F (3C)
Salem, Oregon	Partly Cloudy	51F (11C)	36F (2C)
San Francisco	Rain	59F (15C)	47F (8C)
Seoul	Sunny	44F (7C)	26F (-3C)
Tokyo, Japan	Partly Cloudy	54F (12C)	34F (1C)
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	39F (4C)	38F (3C)

Consultant advises CUC to focus on environment, personnel issues

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Engineering consultant Harris Group is advising the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. to address environmental and personnel issues as it pursues the privatization of its main power plants in Lower Base.

CUC executive director Lorraine A. Babauta, in a report to the CUC board, said that Harris Group advised the utility firm to look at the related environmental impacts of the project.

In particular, it said CUC needs to check on the U.S. Clean Air Act and Pre-certification that would prove that bidders “have technology and experience with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.”

At the same time, the CUC needs to address local environmental requirements, as well as plant facility and land lease ownership issues.

Babauta said the consulting firm also said that “CUC must determine how its partnership will deal with existing employees.”

This would prevent conflict if problems such as personnel layoff arise.

Babauta said the CUC board also needs to act quickly whether it wants to retain ownership of fuel tanks and fuel or whether the vendors will be given options to take over fuel operations.

The CUC board earlier ap-

proved the hiring of Harris Group at \$103,000 to do the scope of work and evaluation of proposals for the privatization project.

CUC earlier said that Harris Group would assist the utility corporation “till the end” to ensure that “we attract the best of the best in global energy producers to partner with our utility, bringing Saipan customers and commercial firms reliable electricity at the cheapest costs.”

CUC said that Harris Group’s scope of work involves the current and future energy requirements for Saipan, based on various economic factors or clients and their potential use of electricity.

This, even as the 13th Senate earlier cautioned the CUC to be cautious in its privatization program, putting in mind the personnel safety at the power plant.

Former senator Ramon Guerrero had said that power plant personnel are being put in danger every time the CUC overloads its engines.

Guerrero said the CUC should resort to load sharing, and not be in the habit of putting more loads than what the engines can handle.

The CUC has received proposals from two proposers since last September.

Initial assessments previously presented by a potential bidder showed that CUC’s main

power plants equipment are very old, run on expensive gas oil, and are not being adequately maintained.

These are the reasons why the cost of power generation on the island is high, according to Seaboard Ship Management Inc., a Florida-based company that visited CUC’s power plants in spring 2003.

“The equipment available for generation of power is outdated, inefficient, and represents a mix of really old engines being utilized as base power units for power generation,” the report said.

It also said that CUC’s power transmission and distribution systems are “generally

old, inefficient, and are over extended beyond its original capacity causing hefty line losses.”

The transmission system requires essential improvements and upgrading, including the installation of a new high voltage transmission line with substation to connect the existing and expanding grid system, it said.

In its proposal, the company said that the existing power plants should be replaced with possibly 35 to 55 MW of new and efficient power. It also said there is a need to install a new 69 KV transmission line loop and a substation to connect lower voltage transmission and distribution systems.

Land settlement checks out today

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

The Marianas Public Lands Authority said that it will issue the first land compensation settlement checks today.

MPLA deputy commissioner Frank Eliptico said that no less than Gov. Juan N. Babauta will present the payment check to a land claimant during a brief ceremony to be held at the MPLA office in Chalan Kanoa at 1pm today.

This, as the MPLA board, which has achieved a quorum with the entry of new Rota member Benita Manglona, meets this morning to formally approve the land settlement payment.

“The first check will be issued at 1pm,” said Eliptico.

The issuance of settlement checks has been delayed lately due to the MPLA board’s lack of quorum following the resignation of member Pedro Atalig and the term expiration of Pedro Igitol.

The board is now composed of three members: Ana Demapan-Castro as chairperson, Manny Villagomez as vice chair, and Manglona.

Previously, the delay was caused by the pending approval of the \$40-million bond floated

by the Commonwealth Development Authority.

The bond money was made available late last year.

The MPLA said it has given land settlement offers to 62 land claimants. Forty-three of them have accepted the offers.

These would be the first batch of claimants to receive the settlement checks beginning today.

movie station

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cars unlimited

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Gore's Game

There goes Al Gore again. Remaking himself. Remaking the Democratic Party. Remaking America. Or so he says.

The former Democratic nominee for president shook up the 2004 Democratic presidential race by endorsing Howard Dean for the nomination. Gore's blessing gives the former Vermont governor, who has been running as an insurgent, the patina of support from the party establishment. And it solidifies Dean's position as the front-runner for the nomination, as unlikely as that may seem.

Does that mean the race is over? Not so fast! Not when there hasn't been a vote cast yet. There's too much about Dean that isn't known. And it is ridiculously presumptive of the media, us included, to award the nomination before any real Democratic voters have been heard from. Let's wait for Iowa, New Hampshire and then all the big states to weigh in.

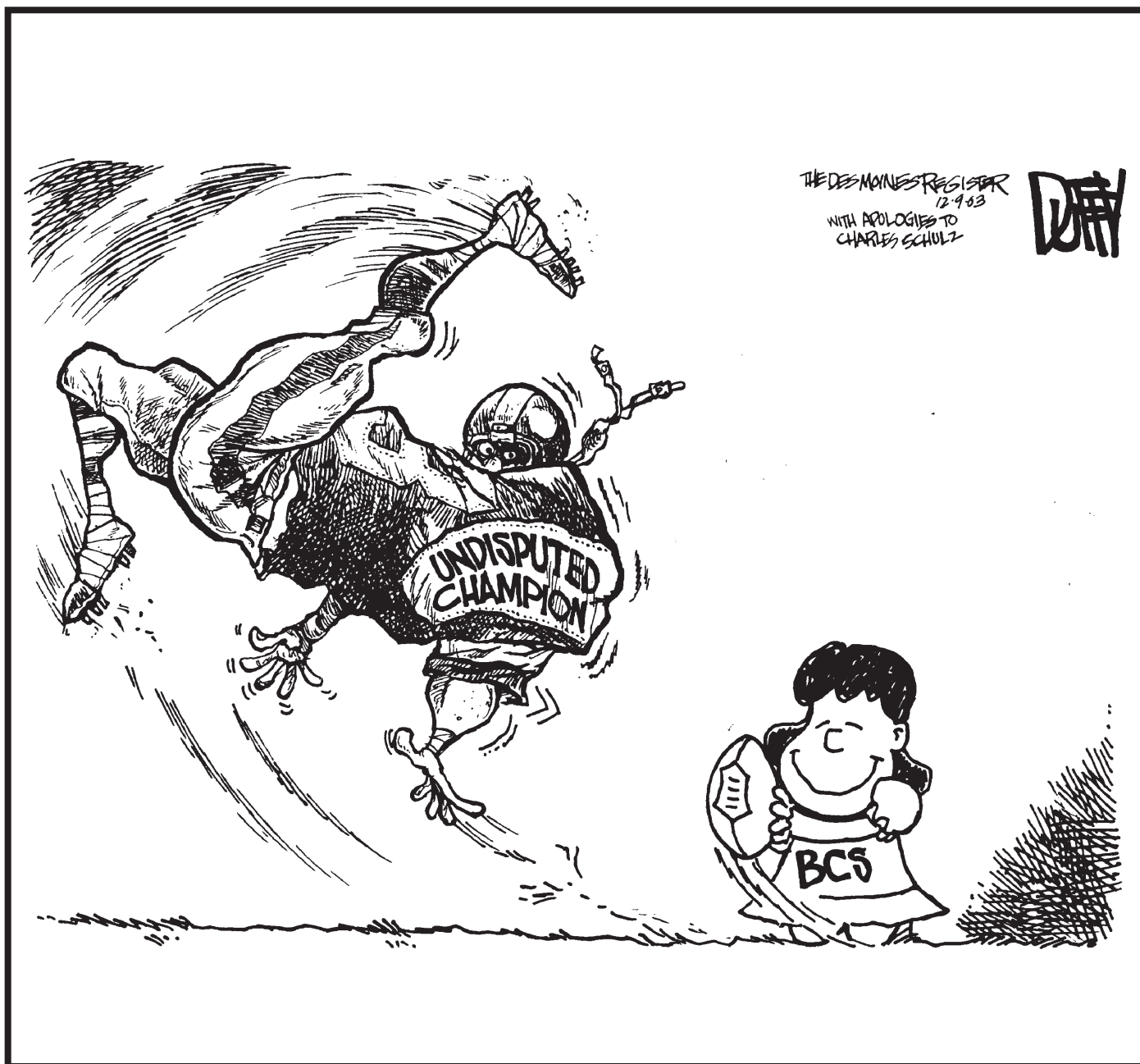
Still, Gore's announcement in the city yesterday was a stunner. Insiders say Gore, who models himself a futurist, was taken with Dean's New Age campaign, especially his use of the Internet to connect with young voters. And Gore, the former vice president, agreed with Dean's early opposition to the war in Iraq.

But while Gore's endorsement will help Dean's candidacy gain a certain credibility, Gore is a somewhat tarnished figure who has grown smaller since he lost the contested election to George W. Bush in 2000. One of the things that hurt Gore the most was the sense that he was constantly "remaking" himself, changing from blue suits to brown, from new Democrat to old. There was a sense of unguineness about Gore, which was not necessarily fair but still hurt him politically. Now he's saying the party has to "remake" itself.

What's his game? Some people were upset that Gore didn't even bother to notify his 2000 running mate, Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, that he was endorsing Dean. It's legitimate to ask how Gore could have chosen Lieberman to be the man to run the nation if anything happened to him and now bypass Lieberman for a man with no Washington experience.

Maybe Gore wants to pick up the New Age voting base that Dean has attracted and use it himself for a run in 2008 if Bush is re-elected. Remake or no, it's still all about politics.

Newsday



Nothing beats a direct flight

For Filipinos—and other members of the community who travel between the Northern Marianas and the Philippines, Continental Airlines' decision to start serving the Saipan-Manila route again is a welcome development. It practically shortens the flying time, thus, making it a stress-free process.

Majority of us have our own personal encounters with a layover—either on Guam or in Seoul, South Korea. And more often than not, it is more straining than fun, no matter how big the airport is or how good the shops are, and how short the layover time is.

I have personal encounters with a layover that is longer than the actual trip itself. I still unfortunately remember strolling around the Guam International Airport for 10 grueling hours when I was once sent to Palau for an assignment. I was literally trapped inside the Guam airport because I didn't have a U.S. visa then to allow me entry into the island-territory.

Just this year, I had to wait 12 backbreaking hours inside South Korea's Incheon International Airport when I attended—together with journalists from all over Asia—a roundtable discussion on migration issues in Bangkok, Thailand.

My Palau and Thailand trips are not what you would say a regular destination among most of us, especially Filipino non-resident workers in the CNMI who mostly touch base once every year. But this year's suspension of the Transit Without Visa program forced a big number of us away from the usual Saipan-Guam-Manila flights offered by Continental Airlines into Asiana Airlines' Saipan-Incheon-Manila service, or Northwest Airlines' Saipan-Japan-Manila route.

There's nothing wrong with stopping over Incheon or Narita on our way to the Philippines but there are also some factors to consider. It's still cheap to take Asiana's Saipan-Incheon-Manila flight but the route practically lengthens the traveling time: 2 hours advance check-in plus 3.5 hours flying time from Saipan to South Korea plus 2 hours layover in Incheon plus about 3 hours flying time from Seoul to Manila equals about 10 exhausting hours of traveling.

Yet still, many travelers put more weight on the extra money they would save by sacrificing a little time strolling around South

By ALDWIN R. FAJARDO

The views expressed are strictly that of the author.
Fajardo is the editor of the Saipan Tribune.



Korea's gorgeous Incheon airport, with all the fascinating retail shops and food establishments sprawling inside it.

Northwest also offers a very tempting package for Manila-bound travelers but it doesn't seem to suit most Filipino workers' travel desires due to strict visa requirements implemented by the Japanese government. Still, a possible visit to the Tokyo Disneyland is still a major thing to consider.

A direct service between Saipan and Manila is the best solution to Philippine-bound passengers' traveling dilemma. Bottom line is, nothing beats a direct service, especially if the destination is only about three hours away from the point of origin.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

We are now in the process of reviewing the accomplishments of those who have made it to the final list of nominees for the annual Saipan Tribune Person of the Year. The Tribune gives this award each year—now on its fifth year—to recognize the efforts and commitment of those who untiringly and consistently do their part in making the CNMI a better place to live in.

Like last year, we will be naming one Person of the Year for 2003 and nine honorable mentions. Nominees are judged based on the impacts of their contributions or efforts on the lives or overall well-being of the people or the community they intended to serve.

Among those who have been recognized in the last five years were: HIV/AIDS educator Moses Saburo (1999); Ports Authority executive director Carlos Salas and then-board chairman Roman S. Palacios, and then-House Speaker Ben Fitial (2000); David Borja, former principal of Hopwood Junior High School (2001); and Rota Mayor Benjamin T. Manglona for 2002.

Who will it be this year?

The adult GPA

Whether it's the Commonwealth seeking to float \$40 million in bonds, or your brother in law trying to finance a car, it seems like every entity and living being on the planet has got a credit rating and credit score appended to their name.

Oh, yuck, credit scores. Does anyone really want to hear about those?

Well, the good citizens of the Commonwealth should, given that the ghost of the Union Bank of California may be haunting your financial records. UBOC is long gone from our shores, but if you held a UBOC credit card, you may have been subjected to a little surprise. At issue is the fact that UBOC actually transferred some or all (I've been told it was all) of its credit card business to another company.

The transfer actually pre-dated UBOC's exodus from our fair shores, and the two events were entirely unrelated.

If you ever dealt with UBOC, you'll recall that they were a prime bank, a quality outfit. UBOC, is a corporate cousin of the Bank of Tokyo Mitsubishi, and the Japanese focus on excellent customer service was certainly a hallmark of UBOC's operations. First Hawaiian Bank, as you know, picked up UBOC's action here and retained many of the excellent staffers, which was good news for the community.

On the less happy end of things, when UBOC slipped its credit card business to another company, things didn't end so well. You have to be very careful who you deal with in the credit card industry, since not all companies are honorable.

As for any former UBOC customers, then, you should review your records carefully. If you have a credit card that has "Union Bank of California" stamped on the front, it may not really be issued by UBOC. Yikes! If you find some unknown company lurking in the background on that one, I'd advise closing the account immediately and taking your business to another place. This is a "consumer alert" from me, and I'll be happy to compile reader feedback on this note, so feel free to e-mail me any experience you may have had along these lines. I have uncovered some disturbing information on the topic and my interest is piqued, big time.

Since I'm on the credit topic, I'll mention that American Express, as well as at least one credit reporting agency, is selling a credit monitoring service. These guys eyeball your credit activity on a daily basis, in order to prevent identity theft or other monkey business from messing with your records. I paid 99 buckaroos to enroll in the service for one year. Cheapskate that I am, I think it's worth dropping a C-note on the deal.

Credit records have become the Grade Point Average of adult life. It's worth keeping an eye on your files.

Meanwhile, I'm gathering the writing files for next year; we've got a lot of ground to cover. The Commonwealth economy will be the hot topic, of course. And—drum roll—yours truly is preparing to launch a new business that you'll be hearing about, which is why I've been in meetings with attorneys this week and have not answered anyone's calls or e-mails. So much for goofing off during the holidays. In fact, I get so worn out planning for 2004 already that I'm wishing that 2003 would last a couple of months longer. I guess that Santa can't deliver more time to even the best of boys and girls.



By ED STEPHENS

Ed Stephens, Jr. is an economist and columnist for the Saipan Tribune. "Ed4Saipan@yahoo.com"

Some soulful memories in papa's bag

You had to take off your shoes. No shoes on the gym floor. No sneakers, either. Not if you were going to do the James Brown during a pep rally at my high school. And during those years, from 1966 to 1968, whenever the band broke into, say, "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag," you were going to do the James Brown.

You had to.

If Martin Luther King Jr. was telling us to stride toward freedom, Brown was showing us how to glide toward it. And of course, we all wanted to arrive in style.

Unlike the twist or the funky chicken, the James Brown required both frenzy and precision—qualities that represented the tensions of our times as we moved from the regimented life of Old South segregation (my school was Booker T. Washington High in Shreveport, La.) toward a world where you could finally say it loud, "I'm Black and I'm Proud!"

The Kennedy Center Honors that Brown received Sunday brought back those memories.

"We honor one of the most influential musicians of the last 50 years," Kennedy Center Chairman James A. Johnson said of Brown. That would put the onset of Brown's influence pretty close to the start of my life.

Last year, I read a profile of Brown in the New Yorker magazine that led me to the conclusion that given Soul Brother No. 1's troubles with the drug PCP and the police, his struggles with past wives, mistresses, girlfriends and others, along with the fallout from some peculiar political stands, he was lucky to be alive.

"Race, poverty and exclusion were the defining features of James Brown's childhood world, and he might easily have seen himself as cursed," Philip Gourevitch wrote in the New Yorker. "Instead, he seems to have understood himself to be a free agent—denied the comforts of a conventional home, but also spared its constraints—with no choice but to fight for emancipation however he could."

Did that explain Brown's weird behavior—or how he survived in spite of it? Did too much adulation and exaltation lead him to believe that he could do no wrong? A Look magazine article in 1969 declared: "James Brown is a new important leader. His constituency dwarfs Stokely Carmichael's and the late Dr. Martin Luther King's." Did such twisted statements go to his head?

All I know is that during adolescence, I'd break out in a cold

By COURTLAND MILLOY
The Washington Post



sweat right along with the Godfather of Soul. I never knew why papa needed a brand-new bag, unless it had wine in it; but I knew what to say when I got something new: "I feel good!" or "I got the feeling!"

And the only way to express that feeling was to do the James Brown—to glide on one leg, if you could, with head bobbing and fists pumping, then spin, jump and fall into a 180-degree split, then snap back up—unhurt—and resume your glide.

I also knew how it felt not to get anything at all, especially from a girl. Again, Brown provided words and rhythm suitable to the occasion in what must be the best begging song of all time by a male vocalist, "Please, Please, Please."

I counted the word "please" 25 times—seven times back-to-

back at the start—on a recording that lasts less than three minutes.

Gourevitch dissected Brown's performance: "With each repetition, he invested the monosyllable with a different emotional accent and stress—prayer and pride, impatience and invitation—and although there was ache in his voice, he did not sound like a man pleading so much as commanding what was rightfully his."

This was not a song for doing the James Brown. Our band couldn't play it, and nobody but Brown could sing it. You couldn't whistle or hum it, either. You could, however, put it on a record player to convey your desire for that special someone to stay just a little longer.

Oh, yes. Good God almighty. Honey, please. Don't. Ohhh. Oh, yeah. Lord. I love you so. Pleeceeeeee. Don't go. Pleece-ee-ee-ee. Don't go. Honey, please don't go. Oh. I love you so. Please. Please.

Singer Bonnie Raitt was quoted in the Kennedy Center Honors program as saying about Brown, "You couldn't even list how many people have been influenced by him."

If only she knew how true that was.

Foreign currencies and CNMI's economy

How do changes in value of foreign currencies affect the CNMI's economy?

International currencies, which are free floating, trade like commodities in the international financial markets and their values are determined on buying and selling volumes. However, some countries keep the value of their currencies fixed and only change as they deem necessary or due to international pressure. Examples of free floating currencies are Japanese yen and American dollar while Chinese yuan is fixed in value. Exchange rates are expressed as value of one country's currency in terms of another country's currency. For example, current price or value of Japanese Yen in terms of U.S. dollar is around 110 yen per dollar, similar to how we express the price of a commodity, such as 2 pounds of bananas per dollar.

When the value of a given country's currency rises its products become expensive to other countries to buy and vice versa. For example, U.S. dollar value against yen has decreased from about 120 to 110 yen in about a year. It means that the prices of the Japanese products for us have increased and the prices of our products to Japanese have decreased. In our case, the CNMI's products and services are cheaper to Japanese visitors because the fall in the value of dollar in terms of yen has increased their buying power. This is also a very favorable factor to get more visitors or the visitors who come here to spend more. On the other hand for the Japanese investors who have to send back their investment returns to their parent companies, this factor is unfavorable because it has reduced the yen value of their returns. It has also reduced the yen value of salaries of Japanese business managers who work here.

Now, looking at the Philippines' case whose currency has been consistently falling against the dollar, this has an opposite effect to

By DR. MOHAMMAD ASHRAF



that of Japan. As soon as the Philippine peso falls, it implies an automatic rise in the wages of Filipino workers in the CNMI because they get paid in dollars. In this case it would be in the best interest of Filipino workers to keep their savings in dollars and send home only enough to meet the needs of their families. Unlike Filipino workers, Chinese workers don't have incentive to keep their savings here because the value of their currency is fixed by the government. As you may have noticed in the national news media

"It would be in the best interest of Filipino workers to keep their savings in dollars and send home only enough to meet the needs of their families. Unlike Filipino workers Chinese workers don't have incentive to keep their saving here because the value of their currency is fixed by the government."

the matter of fixed value of Chinese Yuan (RMB) is under serious debate between the U.S. and China. The U.S. government thinks the Chinese are keeping the value of their currency artificially low, which makes U.S. products expensive in China and Chinese products cheaper in the US. The logic behind this argument is there is over a \$100 billion trade deficit between the

U.S. and China. The United States is asking China to set higher rate of its currency or expect retaliatory actions. In conclusion, I would say our government has no influence whatsoever on the value of any currency and we have to learn to live with the consequences of changing values of currencies particularly in our region. I may also add the news reporting of currency rates would be a valuable service to businesses and workers alike.

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Court upholds convict's prison term

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

Despite claims that a prisoner's life is being threatened inside the CNMI's jail facility, the Superior Court upheld the 10-year prison term it imposed on a man convicted for seriously injuring another with a machete.

Associate Judge David Wiseman said the court did not find adequate reason to reduce the sentence imposed on Nupom, who was earlier convicted on aggravated assault and battery and assault with a dangerous weapon charges.

"At the hearing, some disturbing

facts were stated regarding the safety of [Nupom] at the Division of Corrections and his not being allowed in any rehabilitative programs," Wiseman said.

The judge recommended the DOC to look into this matter and that the Corrections director allow Nupom to participate in rehabilitative programs.

But Wiseman maintained that Nupom should be isolated from the citizenry to protect the society from the danger he poses.

The court sentenced Nupom to 10 years imprisonment on each of the charges. The sentence is being served concurrently pursuant to a court order.

Nupom's convictions stemmed

from assaulting and seriously wounding another with a machete. The victim is suffering from permanent physical disfigurement, Wiseman said.

Wiseman also noted that the court's consideration of Nupom's previous conviction when he was being sentenced on this case.

In a separate case filed against Nupom in 2000, the court convicted the defendant for aggravated assault with a dangerous weapon for stabbing another with a knife. The court meted out a five-year jail term for this offense, but this was suspended except for six months.

FASTER

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to 10 days to fix it," said Salas.

The Labor Department is set to implement the expedited processing amid clamor from the business community and guest workers, according to the deputy secretary.

"We're very receptive. We know what the business community wants. We know what the biggest complaints from the guest workers are. And we are addressing it. As soon as that is accomplished, I would concentrate more efforts on enforcement," said the Labor official.

With a target implementation date

of May 1, Salas said applicants can drop off the complete requirements and pick up their work permit 10 days later.

"You will never have to wait for more than 10 days. If there's a waiting period, it's because there is a deficiency on your part. Because it's not going to be Labor's fault. We're fine-tuning it so much that we're going to be one of the best department agencies in the CNMI," said Salas.

As congressman during the 13th Legislature, Salas criticized the Labor Department over the highly bureaucratic system of processing work permits.

The former chairman of the House Committee on Commerce noted yesterday that "now that I'm at Labor, I've

done the talking, it's now time to do the walking."

He said that talks are ongoing with House legislators on the introduction of a bill that would address the expedited work permit processing.

"I just need Reps. Ray Tebuteb and Joe Guerrero to introduce the bill because I'm writing the bill to amend statutes that has to do with the processing of application at Labor. I'll constantly call these guys up until it's accomplished," he said.

Salas assumed his post as Deputy Secretary of Labor in late January, and was tasked to focus on streamlining the labor processing to address the backlog issue.

US CONGRESS

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Meantime, Washington Resident Representative Pete A. Tenorio said in a separate letter to Babauta that Burton's office has requested for all pertinent information about problems associated with diabetes as well as hospital infrastructure, medical treatment, and medical service needs, including dialysis equipment needs.

Tenorio said that medical personnel involved daily with the operation and management of health care should accompany Dr. Hofschneider to the hearing.

"Statistical information and any other reports and documents describing the extent of health needs and incidences of the various diseases should be provided to the committee," said Tenorio.

DPH spokesman John P. Douglas said the secretary's attendance has been confirmed.

He said the secretary's travel expense will be shouldered by Burton's committee.

Babauta left for Washington D.C. early this week to attend to various functions, including the National Governor's Association annual meeting.

Burton's panel hearing came following his visit to Saipan and other

Pacific territories last December.

During his visit, Burton said he would hold a hearing to help address various CNMI health-related issues, particularly the Commonwealth Health Center's inadequate facilities for dialysis patients.

He also expressed concern on the alarming incidence rate of diabetes among locals.

"I'm going to do what I can when I go back to Washington to get our health agencies to pay more attention to this area... Hopefully, we'll be able to shake loose more money to help solve the problems over here," Burton said.

Burton had toured both the CHC and Guam Memorial Hospital facilities.

NEW

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He cited several priorities, topmost of which is fortifying revenue enhancement.

"I'm going to check the poker, the cash receipts task force and see if they are issuing receipts, to make sure that they are actually paying the tax that is due the government.

"I would go over the public laws that authorize Finance to generate taxes to see if all the businesses are in compliance with those regulations," he enumerated.

Atalig agreed that the government's fiscal woes—highlighted by a cumulative deficit that has ballooned to close to \$100 million as of fiscal year 2003—is probably the reason why there has

been no takers for the Department of Finance portfolio.

"Maybe that's the reason why people have been resigning. The problems are overwhelming. But I don't know if that's the same thing that will happen to me. But I'll try my best to help the government and the governor, and the people of the Commonwealth in a different capacity," said Atalig.

The governor's appointee brings with him years of finance-related experience, being Rota's first tax officer and first resident director of Finance in the First Senatorial District.

He graduated with a degree in business administration with emphasis on public administration.

As he exits the Department of Commerce, which in the interim will be headed by acting Secretary Jesse

Palacios, Atalig said he has done what he had set out to do for the agency.

"First, I established the Registrar of Corporations under Commerce and I expanded the office. Then I acquired some offices for enforcement and compliance. We have a new office now. I started the GDP survey, the economic development census. We have continued a lot of statistics, incoming expenditure survey, and the agriculture survey. So those are problems that I've addressed during my tenure as Commerce Secretary," he said.

Atalig, however, considers his involvement in the rehabilitation of the Bank of Saipan as one of his major accomplishments as Commerce chief.

Meantime, the Senate is planning to address Atalig's nomination during its next session slated for Feb. 24, Tuesday.

Public library closed for one week

The Joeten-Kiyu Public Library is having new air conditioning units installed, forcing it to close starting tomorrow, Feb. 21. It will remain closed for one week.

The library will reopen on March 1, 2004. Additional closing dates may follow.

"We will make every effort to in-

form the general public ahead of time; however we encourage the public to call 235-7322/3 before visiting the library or for more information on closing dates. We apologize for any inconvenience as work is being done to improve the library facility," the library administration said in a statement.

USDA

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marine environment.

The Kagman Project consists of four waterways, two sediment basins, a 70-million gallon reservoir, a 100,000-gallon storage tank, and an irrigation water delivery system.

Two of the waterways will channel surface runoff water into a massive water control structure. The control structure, which is nearing completion, is located southwest of the main Kagman intersection. Water will exit the control structure and flow into either of the other two waterways, each of which ends in a sediment basin designed to remove eroded soil and debris.

One of the sediment basins is already operational, removing sediment from storm water that flows to the Tank Beach conservation area.

The second sediment basin is planned for the next phase of construction. It will be situated upstream of the reservoir, which will be located at the site of an unused quarry. Water captured in the reservoir will be used for irrigation on the Kagman farm plots.

NRCS civil engineer Tim Brasuell, who oversees project implementation, said that Kagman has the highest concentration of flood control structures in the CNMI and is unlike any other venture being attempted on Saipan.

"Upon completion of this phase, we will have poured over 1,577 cubic yards of concrete. That's almost 200 truck loads. We've also placed more than 215 tons of reinforcing steel," Brasuell said.

He assured that the project complies with federal construction requirements, which he described as stringent and require strict attention to detail.

"We have federal construction inspectors on-site at all times to ensure safety and quality," he said. Because the project is under a federal contract, it must comply with the Buy American Act, which requires that materials be purchased in the United States.

The project is about four months behind schedule due to a variety of unforeseen circumstances. The original contractor went bankrupt, stranding men and equipment on three islands. NRCS worked with the bonding company to hire another contractor to finish construction.

"Of several projects left unfinished by the defaulted contractor, the Kagman Project continues progress toward completion," said Brasuell.

Other setbacks were caused by typhoons and a dock worker strike, which resulted in delays of material delivery. The tentative completion date for the current phase, according to the Tano Group Inc., the replacement contractor, is June 1.

Final installation plans include

beautification activities to ensure that the finished product is not cold and industrial looking.

"We've left room within the intersection right-of-ways to allow space for attractive trees and bike and running paths," Crockett said. "We'll work with the Kagman residents to make sure they have a say in how the intersection will look."

Crockett also mentioned that the Education Island learning center, planned and installed with NRCS assistance, is currently available for use by schools as an outdoor classroom for environmental education.

Because the system is not fully operational yet, some of the Kagman farm plots do not have reliable irrigation water at the moment.

"The system is limping along right now, because not all the components are installed and it is being used in a manner it was not designed for," said Crockett. "We ask the farmers to be patient while we work to get everything online. A project like this can't happen without public cooperation."

Crockett also pointed out that tampering with the system is unfair to everyone and results in expensive breakages, a recurring problem within the farmplots.

"Some farmers might think they are being cheated of water, but continued tampering with USDA infrastructure will result in no water for anybody," he said.

Operation and maintenance activities of the Kagman Watershed Project, including management of the irrigation system, is the responsibility of the Saipan & Northern Islands Soil and Water Conservation District.

The District is a partner with the USDA, providing local leadership and direction. District representatives have been closely involved with the project from the very beginning, securing land rights, obtaining permits, and making sure the needs of the local people were considered.

"None of the benefits would be realized without the SWCD," says Crockett. "They had the vision and will to make it all happen."

The planning process for the project began in 1985, when the CNMI government approached Pacific Basin NRCS Director Joan Perry, with a request to solve flooding problems and provide irrigation water.

Since the completion of the Watershed Workplan and Environmental Impact Statement in 1993, NRCS has overseen the installation of a variety of conservation practices.

For more information on the Kagman Watershed Project and other USDA programs, call 236-0888, or visit the USDA Service Center located in the DY Building, Beach Road, South Garapan. More information is available online at www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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